

Protecting Marriage

**Seventh Commandment
Confession: Lord's Day 41**

Scripture: Genesis 2:18-25

**By Pastor John H. Noordhof
Williamsburg Christian Reformed Church**

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People of God: What is the seventh commandment all about? Is it all about sex? That's usually the typical focus in dealing with this commandment, as reflected in the catechism's commentary. And indeed, all forms of sexual ethics are covered under this commandment. As a result, there are plenty of issues that could be dealt with under this commandment from the dangers of pornography to what's wrong with sex outside of marriage.

But we've touched on quite of these issues before, especially in our series a few years ago on "God, Sex, and Marriage", and so I don't want to revisit those items at this time. Instead, I want to provide a more positive message, I want to focus on what is the primary concern of the seventh commandment and that isn't sex, but marriage.

The seventh commandment is all protecting marriage. And one of the greatest threats to marriage is adultery. But it's not the only threat to marriage. There are many other things that can break up a marriage—the lack of good communication, money problems, addiction issues, abuse—all these threaten marriage. But adultery is often the final straw that leads to the breakup of a marriage.

And so the seventh commandment is concerned about protecting marriage. For you see, marriage, as designed by God, needs to be defended, protected and promoted.

As Canadian society we have, in recent years, debated the definition of marriage and we have overturned the historic understanding of marriage

as being between a man and a woman. The created order has been ignored and trampled upon, the consequences of which we have yet to fully realize.

Now the courts are dealing with the question of polygamy. In BC, a small breakaway Mormon group practices polygamy, but the government is reluctant to press charges because they do not think the law against polygamy will be viewed as constitutional.

On Tuesday, the Ottawa Citizen had an opinion article about this issue. It argued how monogamy (only having one wife) is better than polygamy. Polygamy is not good for the women, who end up competing with each other, or for the children, who are neglected by the father who has to spend too much time and money on his wives, as well as increasing violence in society, because if one man can have many wives, it ends up leaving more men unmarried—and that leads to an increase in crime and violence. And so this article, defended monogamy.

Marriage, as designed by God, needs to be defended, protected and promoted. And that's because it is intended to be a good thing. It is meant to be a blessing for those who enter into marriage. I say that, quite sincerely and earnestly, even though I am a confirmed bachelor, although I am told, "never say never." And maybe after this sermon, I'll have to change my ways. I jokingly can rattle off the reasons why not to get married. At the last wedding reception, I offered ten reasons, just from the area of the Wedding Reception itself. Let me just share three of them:

3. The first dance: I am rhythmically challenging, so how I can lead my bride in our first dance, as husband and wife?
2. The slide show: It's not so much the typical baby picture in the bathtub that I'm afraid of—it's the high school picture, with my load of curly hair.
1. All the gimmicks to get the bride and groom to kiss, while they are trying to eat their meal.

All joking aside, as someone who has seen his friends get married, and as a pastor who has officiated at many weddings, I see the value, blessings and joy of those who are married. Marriage is a good thing for so many people. No wonder it needs to be defended, protected and promoted. Yes, I have also seen the hurts, struggles and challenges of married life. Yes, I have seen marriages break down and end in divorce. But that is why marriages need to be strengthened and improved, so that they can be the types of marriages God wants them to be.

The seventh commandment seeks to protect marriage from failure, so that the advantages and blessings of marriage can be enjoyed by husband and wife. But what are those blessings? What are the purposes of marriages that the seventh commandment wants to protect?

Well, one of the best places to find a biblical understanding is in the form for marriage that we use in this church. It's found in the back of the Psalter Hymnal on page 1010. If you have gone to many weddings here, you have it heard often enough. Like many of the forms at the back of the hymnbook, by this time in my career, I almost have it memorized.

But I wonder, whether we really hear it at a wedding. After all, the bride and groom are usually too nervous, too excited, or too focused on each other to really pay attention to what I am saying. (That's why they have to read it ahead of time so that they can honestly say "yes" to what was read). As for the guests, they too are distracted by the frills of a wedding and since they do not follow along in the hymnbook, like we do at baptism or Lord's Supper, these words can quickly pass us by.

So let's look at them and discover what the seventh commandment is trying to protect. Please turn to page 1010. It's the section entitled "Institution and Meaning of Marriage." Page 1010.

It begins by giving a definition of marriage, which is rooted in the created order: "a man and a woman covenant to live together in a lifelong, exclusive partnership of love and fidelity". That's the biblical, creational definition of what marriage is. Then the form goes on to explain four purposes that God intended for marriage. This is what the seventh commandment is seeking to protect.

First, marriage is intended to provide "a context within which husband and wife can help and comfort each other and find companionship." In our Scripture reading, we read: The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Gen 2:18)

It is not good to be alone. We need community. We need companionship. Now, marriage is not the only way this can be fulfilled. Friends, extended family, church, hobby clubs can all have a role to play in finding companionship, but marriage is the ideal place for companionship.

It's why God created Eve to be a companion for Adam. Together, they could image God. Together, they were given the cultural mandate to rule over the creation. Together in marriage they can find companionship. Marriage is ideal for this because you are bound together by your vows. You share the same roof. You are in it for the long haul—for as long as your lives shall last.

As a result, a marriage partner is better than even our best friend. At least, it should be the case. You should be able to share with your spouse, your inmost thoughts and feelings. A spouse should know you better than anyone else does. This type of companionship needs to be defended, protected and promoted.

Second, marriage is intended to provide, “a setting within which we may give loving and tender expression to the desires God gave us.” Here we have the issues of sexuality come in. As Genesis 2:24 puts it: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” Becoming one flesh is intended to be within the bonds of marriage.

But this second purpose is not merely about sex, it is about intimacy. They are not the same thing. They are closely related, but they can be distinguished and unfortunately they can be separated. In some ways, it is very easy to have sex. But achieving intimacy is more than that. It will be reflected in sexual intimacy, but the oneness of husband and wife is far more than that.

That’s the delusion and deception of too much sexual activity today. Pornography, one night stands and the like pretend to offer satisfaction and intimacy, but they fail to deliver. God intended marriage to be place where sexual intimacy can find its true and lasting fulfillment. This is what the seventh commandment seeks to protect.

Third, marriage is intended to provide “a secure environment within which children may be born and taught to know and serve the Lord”. Social studies have borne this truth out. The ideal setting for children to be born and raised is within a family, where there is a loving and caring father and mother.

(In our broken world, the ideal is not always achieved. For our single moms, we need to help them in the absence of a father. Perhaps it is a ministry the church has neglected.)

Marriage needs to be open to the possibility of having children. Now that will not always be the case. Marriages latter on in life, for example. If I would get married very soon, I would be 46 before any child could be born and that, it seems to be me, would be too old to start doing diapers. I’d be retired before the kid moves out of the house.

Anyway, generally speaking, marriage should be open to the possibility of having children. Now this raises a host of personal and private issues, like the use of birth control, how many children, how soon do you want children. These are deeply personal issues, but they impact society as a whole. Right now, the low birth rates in Western European countries mean they are not replenishing the older generation and that has some deep social and economic consequences.

Notice the evangelistic tone in this third purpose of marriage. In marriage, children can be taught to know and serve the Lord. This aspect is often mentioned at baptism. In fact, that’s what the third question in baptism

is all about. The family setting is the best place for children to be taught about God, faith and Jesus. Yes, the church has its role. But so too does the family setting. Hence, the importance of believing parents.

Finally, marriage is intended to provide “a structure that enriches society and contributes to its orderly function.” Marriage isn’t just for the benefit of husband and wife. Or for the children born to them. Or even to the church community. Marriage is for the benefit of society as a whole. Even a secular society, like ours.

Family is bedrock of society. Healthy marriages and families are for the benefit of society. We depend upon it, in ways we really cannot imagine. The breakdown of marriage and family life not only causes a lot of personal grief and turmoil, which requires counseling and support; it also causes social problems that need to be dealt with.

Again I mention the article about polygamy in the Ottawa Citizen. Changing what marriage is all about has an impact upon women, children and society as a whole. It’s why marriage, as designed by God, needs to be defended, protected and promoted. That’s what the seventh commandment seeks to do.

The form for marriage then makes this conclusion: “when these purposes are prayerfully pursued in union with Christ, the kingdom of God is advanced and the blessedness of husband and wife assured.” This is really an amazing conclusion. We could have expected the last part; that husbands and wives will be blessed when they live up to God’s design for marriage. But advancing the Kingdom of God. How does marriage do that?

As Reformed Christians, we have emphasized that the Kingdom of God impacts all areas of life. After all, Jesus is Lord of all. And there is nothing so fundamental to the created order as marriage and family life. As a result, working on your marriage and family is the best Kingdom work there is.

It’s why marriage needs to be defended, protected and promoted. And that’s the ultimate aim of the seventh commandment. Amen.